

Hybrid Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* × Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* on Tenerife, Canary Islands

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Un hybride de Foulque macroule *Fulica atra* × Gallinule poule-d'eau *Gallinula chloropus* à Ténérife, Îles Canaries. Le premier hybride de Foulque macroule *Fulica atra* × Gallinule poule-d'eau *Gallinula chloropus* de Ténérife, Îles Canaries, a été photographié en octobre 2009–janvier 2010. L'hybride était un peu plus grand qu'une foulque et ne possédait pas de ligne blanche le long des flancs, mais le plumage et le bec avaient la couleur et le pattern d'une poule d'eau. Ceci correspond avec la coloration et les caractéristiques morphologiques des hybrides observés sur différents sites en Europe.

Hybrids of Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* and Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* have been reported from several sites in Europe (see van Balen *et al.* 2001 and references therein). All described individuals were quite similar, usually having the size of a coot and lacking any white on the flanks, but having the bill colour and pattern, white undertail and green legs of a moorhen (e.g. Flower 1983, van Balen *et al.* 2001, McCarthy 2006). Some hybrids can resemble American Coot *F. americana* (Moore & Piotrowski 1983). These features should permit observers to distinguish hybrids from any other rail species (Taylor 1996).

On 23 October 2009, we observed a hybrid Eurasian Coot × Common Moorhen at a large water reservoir (125 × 60 m) with vertical concrete sides at Los Silos, north-west Tenerife, in the Canary Islands. It was in the company of an adult Eurasian Coot and an adult and a juvenile

Common Moorhen. The hybrid was slightly larger than a coot and had the colour pattern of a moorhen but lacked the white line on the flanks (Figs. 1–6). The bill was similar in shape to a coot's (with a black wedge in front of the eye), but had the typical yellow-and-red pattern of a moorhen, although the 'red' was more orange. The legs, observed briefly when the bird was preening or flying, were greenish like those of a moorhen but the toes had enlarged lateral lobes as in a coot (Fig. 4). The wing-coverts lacked any white, but the secondaries were browner than the back (Figs. 1–3).

In total we spent more than four hours observing and photographing the hybrid during several visits in October 2009–January 2010. Several moorhens and coots were always present, and usually all of the birds remained close together.



Figures 1–2. Hybrid Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* × Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Los Silos, Tenerife, Canary Islands, January 2010 (Beneharo Rodríguez)

Hybride de Foulque macroule *Fulica atra* × Gallinule poule-d'eau *Gallinula chloropus*, Los Silos, Ténérife, Îles Canaries, janvier 2010 (Beneharo Rodríguez)



Figures 3–4. Hybrid Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* × Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* with adult Common Moorhen, Los Silos, Tenerife, Canary Islands, January 2010 (left) and October 2009; note the hybrid's large size, the lack of white on the flanks, and the green legs and lobed toes (Beneharo Rodríguez)

Hybride de Foulque macroule *Fulica atra* × Gallinule poule-d'eau *Gallinula chloropus* à côté d'une Gallinule poule-d'eau adulte, Los Silos, Ténérife, Îles Canaries, janvier 2010 (à gauche) et octobre 2009 (Beneharo Rodríguez). Noter la grande taille de l'hybride, l'absence de ligne blanche le long des flancs, et les pattes vertes aux orteils pourvus de lobes.



Figure 5. Hybrid Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* × Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* with adult Eurasian Coot and adult Common Moorhen, Los Silos, Tenerife, Canary Islands, January 2010 (Beneharo Rodríguez)

Hybride de Foulque macroule *Fulica atra* × Gallinule poule-d'eau *Gallinula chloropus* à côté d'une Foulque macroule et une Gallinule poule-d'eau adultes, Los Silos, Ténérife, Îles Canaries, janvier 2010 (Beneharo Rodríguez)

Figure 6 (above right). Hybrid Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* × Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* with adult Eurasian Coot, Los Silos, Tenerife, Canary Islands, October 2009 (Beneharo Rodríguez)

Hybride de Foulque macroule *Fulica atra* × Gallinule poule-d'eau *Gallinula chloropus* à côté d'une Foulque macroule adulte, Los Silos, Ténérife, Îles Canaries, octobre 2009 (Beneharo Rodríguez)

Figure 7. Hybrid Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* × Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Tejina ponds, Tenerife, Canary Islands, February 2010 (Beneharo Rodríguez)

Hybride de Foulque macroule *Fulica atra* × Gallinule poule-d'eau *Gallinula chloropus*, étangs de Téjina, Ténérife, Îles Canaries, février 2010 (Beneharo Rodríguez)

We have noted at least one breeding attempt by a pair of Common Moorhens on this reservoir, in August 2008, but none by Eurasian Coot, although individuals of the latter species are usually present, especially in winter (pers. obs.). At other sites on Tenerife (e.g. Erjos, Tejina ponds) and elsewhere in the Canaries both species breed in close proximity, despite behaving aggressively towards each other (Fernández del Castillo 2007, Barone & Lorenzo 2007). On 21 February 2010, we found a hybrid Eurasian Coot × Common Moorhen apparently identical to the Los Silos hybrid at Tejina ponds, north-east Tenerife, >47 km from the first site (Fig. 7). As we did not observe the bird there during subsequent visits, we suspect that it was the Los Silos individual.

The hybrid documented here is apparently the first for the Canaries (Martín & Lorenzo 2001, Clarke 2006), which is the western limit of Palearctic breeding populations of both Eurasian Coot and Common Moorhen. Because hybrids are very conspicuous (Randler 2004), the previous lack of observations in the islands could reflect the limited number of observers, the two species' small breeding populations (Tenerife has c.50 breeding pairs of Eurasian Coot and 50–100 pairs of Common Moorhen), or their slight differences in breeding habitat (more open wetlands for Eurasian Coot, small ponds with vegetated shores for Common Moorhen: Sánchez-Zapata *et al.* 2005, Barone & Lorenzo 2007, Fernández del Castillo 2007), limiting the opportunity for mixed pairings (Randler 2006).

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